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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 001747

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/PASCUAL

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TAGS: KWBG PGOV PREL PTER PHUM KPAL IS
SUBJECT: CANDIDATE LISTS SHAPING UP FOR JERUSALEM'S MAYORAL ELECTION

Classified By: Acting Principal Officer Greg Marchese, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Jerusalem's Haredi (ultra-orthodox) community is still considering three contenders for the November 11 mayoral elections, but expects to settle on a single candidate in advance of the campaign. Many see MK Porush, anointed as the United Torah Judaism Party (UTJ) candidate in a deal between the party's factions, as too "hard core" to defeat a secular candidate. Current UTJ Mayor Lupolianski may therefore run for a second term if the party can rework the deal. Former Shas Chairman Deri has said he will run if he can overcome the short-term ban against his participation in politics, splitting Haredi support between three candidates. The Haredi community expects to settle on a single candidate in advance of the campaign. A victory for nationalist candidate Barkat will depend in part on encouraging voter turnout among the secular, traditional, and modern Orthodox voters. Thus far, Barkat consistently takes the lead over all Haredi candidates in polls. Social Justice candidate Gaydamak refuses to drop out of the race, despite low polls. Palestinians are not expected to vote in great numbers, consistent with past practice. Sur Bahir Mukhtar Hamdan has entered the race, and Palestinian leaders are publicly split on whether Palestinians should participate.
End Summary.

SELECTION OF ORTHODOX CANDIDATE ON-GOING

¶2. (SBU) A single Haredi (ultra-orthodox) candidate has yet to emerge in the race for Jerusalem's mayor, with three possible contenders maneuvering for the position. The Haredi community makes up roughly one third of the Jerusalem electorate, traditionally unites around a single candidate, and has a high voter turnout. To win, a Haredi candidate also needs support among non-Haredi voters.

¶3. (SBU) UTJ MK Meir Porush was anointed UTJ candidate in a deal struck before the last mayoral election, in which current Mayor Uri Lupolianski, from the UTJ's Degel Hatorah faction, agreed to step down to allow a candidate from the Agudat Yisrael party to run. Porush comes from a politically active Haredi family and is seen as "hard core" Orthodox, which some fear will alienate non-Haredi voters. Local press speculates Lupolianski, who beat Barkat in the 2003 elections, could seek a second term if Porush does not gain non-Haredi support. Lupolianski's Deputy Political Advisor for International Affairs, Elad Halevy, told PolOff that Lupolianski will seek a second term only if he has agreement from Agudat Yisrael to avoid creating a rift among the Haredi.

¶4. (SBU) Former Shas Party Chairman Arieh Deri, another potential Haredi candidate, has said publicly that there will be one Haredi candidate in the race and that the candidate with the best chance of success should run. Deri cannot formally run for mayor at present because he was convicted in

2002 of accepting bribes, fraud, and breach of trust. By law, anyone convicted of a crime that bears "moral turpitude" cannot run for political office for seven years after release from prison. Deri has sought clemency based on legal technicalities and may appeal to President Peres for an official pardon. If he runs, Deri's campaign will focus on keeping Jerusalem undivided while investing in East Jerusalem's infrastructure. He has courted secular voters with his promise to allow Jerusalem's Gay Pride parade to continue.

SECULAR CANDIDATE LEADING IN POLLS

¶5. (SBU) Nationalist candidate Nir Barkat -- a high-tech millionaire and right-wing politician who is currently the Municipal Council Opposition Leader -- has focused his campaign on reaching out to secular, traditional, and modern Orthodox voters, hoping to promote a higher voter turnout in this sector based on social issues, such as education and the environment. Barkat lost to Lupolianski in 2003, but polls this year put him in the lead over Porush, Lupolianski, or Deri, with Porush having the lowest chance of defeating Barkat. As Jerusalem's Haredi population increases, Barkat says he wants to balance the needs of the religious communities with the needs of non-religious residents and with municipal development. Barkat's strong stand on an undivided Jerusalem has alienated some left-wing voters.

¶6. (SBU) Russian-born billionaire Arkadi Gaydamak, who formed his own Social Justice Party based on socio-economic issues, has consistently polled lowest in this race, but so

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far refuses to drop out, although he hints at running with Deri if Deri runs. Gaydamak has tried to appeal to Haredi and Arab voters by promising to ban the Gay Pride parade and meeting with Jerusalem Mufti Muhammad Hussein. Competing against candidates with much broader bases, Gaydamak is not expected to significantly expand his support.

PALESTINIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTION

¶7. (SBU) Historically, less than five percent of Palestinians participate in municipal elections, arguing that to vote is to legitimize Israeli control over East Jerusalem. Zuhair Hamdan, Mukhtar of the Palestinian neighborhood Sur Bahir, announced his intention to run for mayor this year, breaking the Palestinian boycott. Local Palestinian contacts told PolOff Hamdan is widely perceived as being too close to the Israeli establishment, and that his candidacy will not encourage Palestinians to vote.

¶8. (SBU) PA Governor of Jerusalem Adnan Husseini told PolOff the PA will encourage Palestinians not to vote this year, and said Palestinian officials discouraged al-Quds University President Sari Nusseibeh from publicly calling for Palestinians to participate as he has in past years. Senior PFLP member and PLO-EC member Abd al-Rahim Maluh said publicly that voting in the elections would "advance the recognition of the annexation of East Jerusalem" and denounced calls for Palestinians to vote.

¶9. (SBU) Rami Nasrallah, Director of the International Peace and Cooperation Center (IPCC), said marginally more East Jerusalemites might vote this year to demonstrate that Jerusalem is their "center of life" and protect their status as Jerusalem residents. He said the lack of Palestinian civil culture; the Israeli prohibition against Palestinian organizations in Jerusalem; and unfamiliarity with Israeli political parties, platforms, and voting procedures are also obstacles to Palestinian voting.